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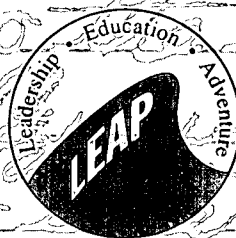
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ABSTRACT

The Leadership Education Adventure Partnership (LEAP) is a program of For Love of Children in Washington, D.C., that aims to turn the lives of at-risk adolescents toward healthy development and a productive future. Beginning at age 10, LEAP involves youth in wilderness adventure activities that help them discover their strengths and develop confidence and problem-solving skills. Starting with a 2-week summer adventure camp experience, the program continues with reunion activities in the city throughout the year, pairs youth with mentors, and stays in touch with families. Each year as youth are invited back, they are offered greater challenges and greater responsibility. The LEAP model embodies the four basic philosophies of early intervention, experiential learning, a broad-based approach, and the value of the natural world. Although LEAP youth are among the highest-risk youth in the city, those who continued in the program for 3 years or more had a 5 percent dropout rate (compared to 50 percent citywide). This report provides an overview of LEAP philosophies and procedures, discusses the context for LEAP, discusses results and the evaluation process, and presents needs and possibilities for the future. It focuses on how LEAP and its key components, especially the adventure experiential methodology, have evolved and assesses what has been most effective and most worth replication. An appendix provides a site description, a program description, and assessment tools. (Contains 18 references.) (CDS)



LEAP: An Investment in the Future of At-Risk Adolescents

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LEAP

An Investment in the Future of At-Risk Adolescents

By Nancy Van Scoyoc

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Executive Summary



Early adolescence is a time of particular vulnerability, when life patterns are set in positive or negative directions. For low-income youth at high risk of school dropout, delinquency, joblessness and dependency on public welfare, it is the last best opportunity to turn lives around toward healthy development and a productive future.

This is the purpose of the Leadership Education Adventure Partnership (LEAP), a program of FLOC (For Love of Children) in Washington, DC. Beginning with youth at age 10, LEAP employs powerful Outward Bound-type adventure activities which help youth discover their strengths and develop confidence and problem solving skills. LEAP then follows up with them year-round and year-after-year until they graduate from high school.

Starting with a two-week summer adventure camp experience at the LEAP wilderness camp facility near Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, the program continues with reunion activities in the city throughout the year, pairs youth with mentors and stays in touch with families. Each year, as youth are invited back, they are offered greater challenges that involve them physically, mentally and emotionally as they are given greater responsibility. Camp size has been limited to about 30 youth per session, guaranteeing highly individualized attention, intense learning and opportunities for strong role model identification.

As youth get older, week-long adventure expeditions are added to the in-camp format. These include backpacking, canoeing, caving, rock climbing and ropes course activities. From 14 and up, youth are involved in a six-week summer jobs program, in which they become junior assistants at camp and are involved in community service projects in the city. At 16, youth may choose to continue with the junior assistant program or seek full time employment. Either way, LEAP continues to offer support through high school graduation.

LEAP goals are:

- Enhance students' confidence, self esteem and interpersonal skills.
- Develop skills for problem solving.
- Learn to deal with stress and conflict without resorting to violence.
- Increase motivation to achieve in school and to reach life goals.
- Gain job skills and experience.
- Create opportunities for youth to make a contribution to the community.

The LEAP model embodies the following basic philosophies:

1. **Early intervention** that builds on strengths, rather than attempting to "fix" problem behaviors.
2. **Experiential learning** through specially structured outdoor challenge activities, as well as experiential (learning-by-doing) methods employed in all activities.
3. Addressing underlying factors contributing to negative behaviors through a **broad-based approach**, rather than a single-focused approach such as a drug prevention program.
4. Utilizing **the value of the natural world** as a healing environment and for self-directed learning.

LEAP youth are among the highest risk youth in the city. Most are on public assistance; a majority have lived in homeless shelters and are in single parent families; and most live in poor neighborhoods where violence is prevalent. In spite of this, **of youth continuing in LEAP three years or more, only 5% have dropped out of school, compared to a 50% school dropout rate in the city.**

Since the program was begun in 1988, more than 130 youth have participated. Results are measured by school and program

retention rates as well as staff, youth and parent feedback. There has been an average yearly return rate above 70%, with more than half continuing with LEAP three years or more. Moreover, half of the original boys and girls in years one and two, most of whom were recruited from homeless shelters, are still connected with LEAP eight years later.

These youth have shown extraordinary resiliency under adversity. There is strong evidence that LEAP provides a critical caring link to the community, coupled with well structured growth opportunities through challenge. Parents attest to the importance of maintaining the connection throughout the year and over time. In lives where stability is rare, moves frequent and danger and violence taken for granted, the LEAP experience proves that, indeed, children will respond positively in a safe, supportive environment where caring adults believe in their potential and they are given a wide variety of new experiences and learning challenges.

The mission of the FLOC Outdoor Education Center is to facilitate the healthy growth and development of youth and adults through outdoor adventure challenges that lead to discovering their strengths and skills for achieving positive life goals.

Staff evaluations and parent and student feedback suggest that key factors in LEAP's effectiveness are:

- Challenge activities, supervised by caring staff, in an atmosphere of mutual support and accountability.
- Integration of experiential learning in all phases of activities.
- Long-term continuity over three or more years.
- Development of a positive peer group.
- Connection of staff with families.
- Consistent structure that includes goal-setting and clear boundaries.
- Diverse activities that have transfer value to home situations.

Much of the LEAP program can be replicated. It requires a vision of the potential inherent in all youth, a strong commitment from staff and funders over an extended period of time and the facilities and natural resources for a varied adventure challenge program.

"I never thought I'd be in a shelter. I never thought I'd have to take my kids and live like this. But a situation came where I had to. I've applied to some DC programs that should help us get an apartment. And I'm taking classes at UDC to become a nurse's aide....I try to have positive thoughts — for the kids. If I just lie around all day and do nothing, then they'll think that's what they can do. To see me going to school shows them that they have to have an education to get anywhere in this world.

"This summer my social worker told us about a camp program run by FLOC that she thought might be good for my oldest son. When you hear 'camp' you think that it won't include learning, just play, play, play. But this was different. He went for three weeks, and when I came to visit on the last day, I was so impressed. My son doesn't read too well, but that day, he sat down and read a book to me. I could see that the boys got to care for their teachers and the teachers got to care for the boys. My son came home with a lot of ideas about what he wanted to do in school. He draws real good and wants to be an architect. After camp he told me was going to put his school work first.

"So many kids in the shelter system need someone to take them by the hand and say, there is a better life out there."

from a first-year LEAP mother who was living in a shelter

Part I — Overview

For two years he lived in one room in a homeless shelter in a very depressing situation with his mother and two sisters. But he had a special spark, he loved to read, and he loved the outdoors. After his first LEAP backpacking expedition, he vowed he'd never walk that far again — but he kept coming back. Now he has moved out of town, found a full-time job, supports himself and has bought a car — and he keeps coming back to visit.

...6-year LEAP participant.

The first year at Girls Camp she was the smallest camper, but had the most energy. Nothing was too hard for her. She has moved five times in the last eight years, and her mother struggles hard to take care of the family of four. She hopes to graduate soon and wants to be a doctor. She says about LEAP: "It made me a leader, not just a follower."

...7-year LEAP participant.

This mother landed in a shelter with her five children when her husband was sent to jail on drug charges. She knew there had to be a way out and a way to raise her children with dignity. In spite of a sight problem from birth, she persevered and found a way to bring in income as a day care provider. Three of her children have been in LEAP and she hopes the fourth will start next year. She says: "The most positive thing about LEAP is that it gives them challenges and opportunities to try new things. They get praise for trying."

...LEAP mother since 1988.

INTRODUCTION

By popular categorization, LEAP (Leadership Education Adventure Partnership) would be called a dropout/delinquency prevention program. It started by targeting homeless kids. Its aim also falls under drug prevention and violence prevention. But "prevention" connotes the negative — something to stop the evil. **LEAP's purpose is positive** — to support youth in discovering their strengths and abilities and developing these strengths toward the goal of becoming fully functioning, contributing citizens in their community.

The key element is an **outdoor challenge methodology that has the power to turn lives around**. It is a unique programmatic response to the urban crisis the city is facing.

LEAP has **completed eight years of working with high-risk youth** and their families in Washington, DC. It is a program of FLOC (For Love of Children), a private social service agency operating for 30 years in the nation's capital.

This paper will describe how LEAP and its key components, especially the adventure/challenge experiential methodology, have evolved and assess what has been most effective and most worth replication. Its purpose is to synthesize. Although this report is not a technical evaluation, it will describe in some detail how the program has developed and what methods and activities have been used. The intended audience includes practitioners in youth programs,

policy makers, community organizations concerned with youth, parents and the general public.

THE VISION

The effectiveness of Outward Bound for older youth (age 15 years and up) has been clearly documented. When LEAP was started in 1988, the **vision**, as articulated by Fred Taylor, FLOC's executive director, Nancy Van Scoyoc, the new director of LEAP, and the LEAP management board was **"to develop a program for youth facing multiple challenges where learning, growth, healing and re-creation could turn the tide of learned helplessness."**

LEAP uniquely reaches youth, beginning at age 10, with outdoor challenge and experiential learning, builds on strengths with early intervention, provides year-round follow-up from staff and mentors, and works with families in a constructive community approach.

Implementation of the Vision

In 1988, Washington, DC, like many other cities, was facing a growing crisis of homeless families. The effects on the children of terrible instability, physical hardship, exposure to drugs and violence and the stigma for school children

of living in homeless shelters, was taking a frightening toll on a fast increasing sector of the city population.

At that time, FLOC's commitment for the last 20 years had been to neglected, abused and otherwise high-risk children and families in Washington. The crisis of growing homelessness in the city intersected with the agency's resolve to develop a new program utilizing the unique resource of its 240-acre wilderness property near Harpers Ferry, WV. The site had belonged to FLOC for more than 10 years but had been largely unused for the previous five years.

The vision quickly took the shape of a **summer intensive three-week wilderness adventure camp experience**. The reports of how homeless kids were falling behind in school and had nowhere safe to play spurred us on to launch a "pilot experiential education project." The program began by recruiting a dozen boys between the ages of 10 and 14 from homeless shelters to spend three weeks at FLOC's wilderness camp site. The time would be spent in a varied program of outdoor challenge activities and fun, learning projects and games, the community living experience of sleeping in cabins in the woods with three other boys and a counselor and sharing meals, jobs and activities throughout the day.

For these 12 boys, this three-week immersion experience was like being transplanted to another planet, according to their later recollection. They were very scared; they were excited; and finally, **when they overcame their initial fears, they were exhilarated at the freedom of exploring, playing and learning in a climate of safety**. When it was time to go back to the city, many of them cried and did not want to go.

Staff immediately appealed to a local church congregation to find **mentors who would help our staff follow up with the boys**, visit them in their homeless shelters and assist their families where they could. A couple of weeks later this letter was received from one of those boys:

"Hi! Mrs. Van Scoyoc I got those stamped envelopes you sent me. Thank you for coming to see me. It was real nice of you too introduce me too Don and Holly. Don took me and my two sisters too the zoo and swimming. Holly wrote me a letter, my two sisters a letter and my mom a letter. How have you been. I have been thinking about you and all the counselors at camp. Mr. Miller the most because he is my best friend. Mrs. Scoyoc I have been thinking. If only camp could have lasted longer than 3 weeks. I am very glad we had those 3 weeks."

...Kendrick Williams, age 13

Now, **nearly eight years later, staff are still in contact with Kendrick and five other of the original 12 boys**. One graduated from high school and was a counselor at the

LEAP camp in 1995. One dropped out of school and three expect to finish high school in the next year. Another left home to live with a grandmother in North Carolina; he has been working full time for more than two years, has bought a car and continues to visit FLOC to support our annual fund raising walk each year. Five of these first-year boys have a total of eight siblings currently active in LEAP. Of the other six boys from the first year, two outgrew the program and four moved out of the area. **About 130 additional boys and girls have been participants in LEAP, the majority of them attending three years or more**. About 60 are currently participating.

THE DEVELOPING STRUCTURE

Challenges & Resources

The initial summer's experience fueled FLOC's dream of building a comprehensive youth-serving program with wilderness challenge activities as a focus. However, we faced multiple issues and **challenges in our resolve to continue our connection with the original boys and expand LEAP to include more high-risk youth, both girls and boys**. Some of these were:

1. How to **maximize the potential of a "wilderness" experience** for city youth, determining their developmental needs and building a program to try to meet them.
2. How to target/recruit the youth who would best benefit from such an experience.



3. How to **gain the confidence and cooperation of neighborhood schools and other groups** for youth recruitment and year-round follow-up.
4. What to offer in terms of **year-round support**.
5. How to support youth in **transferring the skills and confidence built in the summer to their challenges in school** and with their peers and families.
6. How to **develop the existing facilities** on our site to better meet our program goals.
7. How to **fund and staff** a program that would use FLOC's outdoor facility to its capacity.

Along with the special issues and challenges, several factors have **facilitated the development of LEAP**:

1. Having the use of an **extensive wilderness site**, both remote from civilization and only 65 miles from Washington, DC.
2. Having usable facilities and some basic equipment at the site.
3. Being **part of a well-established private social service agency** with an excellent reputation in the community.
4. Starting with **staff highly experienced** in a powerful methodology of outdoor challenge and group building.
5. Having the full **commitment and trust** of a visionary **executive director** of the agency and **management board**.
6. Beginning the program with a "nest egg" of more than **\$80,000 from a grant** for development of program at the outdoor facility.

Outdoor Challenge Programming

From the beginning, the **heart of the LEAP intervention rested on the powerfulness of an experientially-based outdoor challenge methodology** (see detailed descrip-

tion in Part II, under *Experiential Learning*). As the boys that first summer responded, at first hesitantly and then enthusiastically, the benefits of conquering fear, building self esteem and learning skills through carefully guided new experiences were apparent. This reinforced the belief that the challenge methodology could be usefully applied to these youth. The vision soon evolved into **inviting youth back to camp year after year, with new challenges** each year. These include additional ropes course challenges (a series of group physical problem-solving challenges—see *Appendix I for description*) and other outdoor adventure activities like rock climbing,

backpacking and caving. Expeditions away from camp get longer and more strenuous as the youth get older and include various opportunities for service projects.

Year-Round Follow-up

The year-round follow-up with youth in the city was not fully envisioned at the outset. Beyond the firm conviction at the end of the first summer experience that LEAP must find ways to continue supporting these 12 youth and that volunteers were needed to help do so, there was no firm plan for what this would look like in the future. By the third year the operating concepts were distilled into a simple visual model (see *Figure 1, page 7*) called the "Can Do" model describing the summer interven-

tion and then the components of continuing contact back in the city—**reunion activities, mentors, school advocacy and family support**.

This follow-up model evolved from a **holistic philosophy** that to be most effective, any effort from a community program needs to coordinate to some degree with school and family. What was not anticipated at the outset was how many years these youth would want to



"LEAP gave us a chance to get away from the life we knew where trouble could either find you or you could find it! By us getting involved with LEAP, it gave us an outlet and a way out."

fourth year LEAP boy, age 15

return and what their needs would be as they progressed from young pre-teens to middle and late teens. These needs eventually focused on the desire for summer jobs for youth years 14 and up, combined with the continuing need for recreation and activities with a positive peer group. **Meeting these middle- and late-teen needs is now both LEAP's greatest challenge and possibly its greatest opportunity for unique service.**

Programming with Other Groups

A third area of working and planning programs with other FLOC and community groups was envisioned from

To Anthony who moved away after his first year at FLOC...

"I am very sorry you had to move! We had such a good time at camp. It was like we were a family. I hope I will be able to see you again.

Your friend."

first year LEAP boy, age 12

the outset and has developed gradually. Though the primary focus has been on LEAP, the additional programming has made fuller use of the site and has provided additional income to support the LEAP program and site development. LEAP staff have worked with youth-at-risk from FLOC's group home and alternative school, as well as youth from other com-

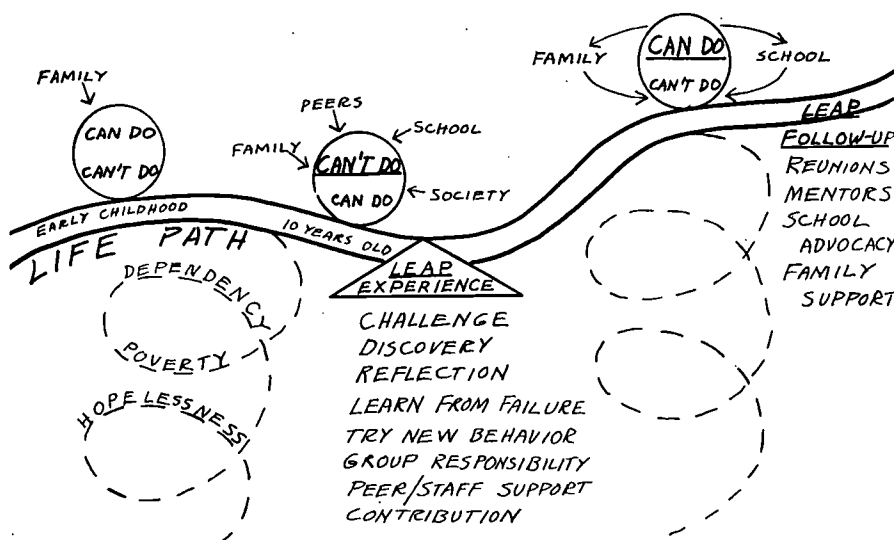
munity programs, staff groups from agencies, church groups, etc. This paper does not include a description of this area of program. However, from the beginning the belief has been that **careful development of these other program areas will ultimately benefit LEAP through fuller exposure of the community to LEAP and the collaborative possibilities this opens up for creative developments in the future.**

Figure 1: LEAP "CAN DO" MODEL

A Life Journey Developmental Model

A child's internal messages of "can do" and "can't do" are key to the way a child interacts with the environment and the trajectory of his/her life path — a positive upward direction, or a negative downward spiral. A child's self-esteem and the course of a child's life path are strongly influenced by the messages from the environment.

A recent self-esteem study by Carol Gilligan clearly shows a drop in self-esteem between elementary school and junior high. A dynamic positive intervention at this point has



the potential of altering that developmental path significantly upward.

An experience like LEAP can start a child in a new direction that must then be sustained by follow-up that continues to feed back to the child "can do" messages, rather than returning to the old "can't do" messages.

This follow-up, to be most effective, should include positive reinforcement from family and school. Also, some continuing contact with staff and peers involved in the initial intervention experience will help sustain the benefits over time.

Part II — Context for LEAP

GETTING STARTED WITH FLOC

FLOC has been a leader for many years in the private sector of social service agencies in Washington, DC. It was founded through the joint effort of a group of churches to address the terrible abuse and neglect of children in a city institution called Junior Village. Beginning in 1965, FLOC led an eight-year collaborative effort to close down Junior Village, and to better serve youth separated from their parents. FLOC has developed and runs programs for foster care, an alternative school for special education, a therapeutic group home for adolescent males, a transitional housing program for families and the Outdoor Education Center. **FLOC's basic mission has continued to be to serve neglected, abused and otherwise high-risk children and families in the District of Columbia and to support their healthy development and full participation in the community.**

In the '70s, FLOC was given a long-term lease on a 240-acre portion of a 1,600-acre tract of land in nearby West Virginia. This piece of land was used for several years as a site for a long-term (up to 18 months) therapeutic wilderness school for boys developed on the model described by Campbell Loughmiller in *Wilderness Road*¹

For this purpose, a main building, shower house, storage building and four campsites were built and used until 1983. The program was closed in 1983, due to lack of funding. For five years the management board explored various program alternatives for the site.

After serving as a consultant to the board for several months, Nancy Van Scoyoc was hired in January, 1988, to direct a new program using the resources of the site for a high-risk population of youth in Washington, DC.

BACKDROP: CITY SITUATION AND STATISTICS

Though LEAP's initial focus was on children from homeless shelters, the homeless population was and is only a small fraction of the low-income population of the District in great need of supportive services. The D.C. Kids Count Collaborative reported the following in June, 1995:

- About **one-half of all D.C. children live in poverty** today.
- Nearly three-fourths of births to D.C. residents are to single mothers and about **one child in six is born to a teen-aged mother** (the highest rate of any state and

the highest among 22 of the nation's largest cities).

- More than half of the District's children now live in families where the **fathers are absent**.
- Child support cases more than doubled in number in 1994.
- **Violent deaths of teen-agers set an all-time high** with 106 occurring in 1993²

Other key findings from the Children's Defense Fund's "Bright Futures or Broken Dreams – Status of the Children of D.C. and Agenda for the '90s" are:

- Each night **1,300 children sleep in homeless shelters** across the city.
- The District places **twice as many children in foster care** as the national average.
- The District **invests virtually nothing in intensive family preservation** programs, which cost an average of \$3,000 per child.
- An estimated 280 youths are maintained in residential treatment programs in distant states, at an average cost of \$80,000 per episode.³

These statistics have been compounded by a worsening school situation, increasing violence in the schools as well as on the streets and the critical financial situation of the city. Federal cutbacks in programs, as well as the city crisis, have created a corollary crisis in private funding of social service programs, because local demand on foundations and other charitable sources has increased, by some reports, as much as ten-fold in the last 15 years.

What has developed in the District of Columbia (as in many other cities) is a desperate need for youth programs that will provide positive activities in after-school hours and that take a broad-based approach to the multitude of challenges facing youth.

There are a large number of adolescent programs aimed at prevention, like substance abuse prevention, violence prevention and dropout/delinquency prevention; there are also mentor programs, week-long summer camps and tutoring programs. However, most of these are targeted approaches that focus on a single "problem."

What is much more difficult to find are broad-based approaches that address underlying causes of negative behavior, such as low self-image, poor interpersonal skills, lack of positive role models, exposure to drugs, violence and other negative influences of the street. These broad-based, or "generic," approaches provide a range of social supports that

may not be available within families, schools or neighborhoods. According to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's recently released nine-year study, it is these **broad-based generic approaches that have the greatest potential of fostering healthy behavior** in adolescents and are especially effective with young people who are at moderate risk of negative outcomes.⁴

A six-week or six-month program focused on substance abuse prevention or violence prevention is not likely to have a profound long-term effect. Similarly, short-term narrowly focused youth employment training programs have not proven to be an effective vehicle for achieving those goals.⁵

The fact that **LEAP was positioned as part of a stable social service agency to commit to long-term follow-up**, even though FLOC did not fully realize what that would mean at the outset, **provided the opportunity to continually work at refining the basic concepts working with the same youth**. Staff were learning as the youth were learning, and the group was small enough that staff grew to know them very well.

BELIEFS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF LEAP

From the beginning, LEAP's bottom line has been to offer experiences that would foster healthy development in children especially challenged by a negative environment. The program that evolved was based on the following general beliefs and philosophies of learning, growth and development:

1. **Early intervention** that builds on strengths, rather than trying to "fix" problem behaviors.
2. **Experiential learning** through a wide variety of both ordinary activities and specially structured challenge activities.
3. **Broad-based or generic approach** that deals with some of the underlying factors that increase the likelihood of negative behaviors, rather than a single-focused approach.
4. **The value of the natural world** as a healing environment and for self-directed learning.

Early Intervention

The initial decision was to **target youth age 10 and up**. The reasoning was that 10 is generally an age when children are old enough to be away from home for a period of two or three weeks, curious and open to new experiences and not yet involved in many of the negative behaviors we were seeking to prevent. David Hamburg, the Chair of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development describes the 10 to 14-year-old stage in this way:

"There's a wonderful sense of discovery in these years. Kids are exploring, experimenting, trying on all sorts of behavior for size. The patterns are not yet cast in concrete and they can be shaped in healthy ways. Or they can become a time bomb, waiting to go off."

Shaping some healthy patterns is exactly what was intended. The thought also was to **forestall the predictable drop in self-esteem at the time of entering junior high school**, or about age 12, that was noted in a national study of 3,000 girls and boys done in 1990.⁶

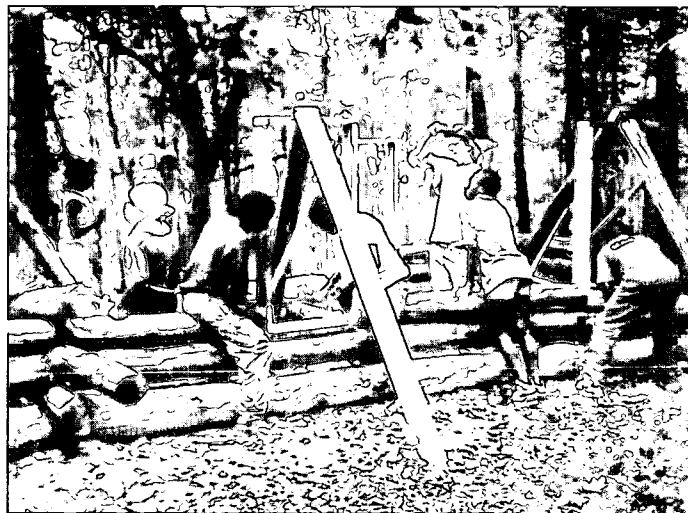
There are a host of other rationales for early intervention, including **cost savings**. LEAP's cost per child under 14 has been about \$3,000 a year, compared with \$20,000 to \$100,000 for residential treatment centers for delinquents.

In a vivid analogy of society's tendency to wait until teens get into trouble before acting, Hawkins and Catalano, in writing about prevention programs, declare: *"It is as if we were providing expensive ambulances at the bottom of a cliff to pick up the youngsters who fall off, rather than building a fence at the top of the cliff to keep them from falling off in the first place."*⁷

Figure 2, page 11 graphically portrays the level at which FLOC aims to intervene, with the LEAP program as the top layer of a downward spiral and other FLOC programs intervening at other levels.

Experiential Learning

The simplest popular definition of experiential learning is **what one learns by doing**, rather than what one hears or reads or receives by some other form of communication or didactic instruction. In the field of outdoor education, the focus has been on **structured physical activities that pre-**



sent a variety of physical, cognitive and emotional challenges. In making the best use of this medium, the activities are usually framed in the context of certain goals set by the group and/or instructors and discussion afterwards of what happened and what was learned from it.

This is an “**action/reflection**” model that can be applied to an endless variety of situations where group behaviors are involved. As those versed in this model know, it means that “experiential learning” goes far beyond just the structured physical challenges that might be presented to a group. It includes, or can include, almost anything that happens in a day at camp, or on a wilderness expedition, or back at home in a situation with peers or family or anybody. But one does not always learn from experience alone. What is often necessary to facilitate learning is: 1) identifying what happened, 2) acknowledging feelings, thoughts and their behavioral consequences, 3) discussing what was learned and generalizing from the experience.

Outward Bound, the outdoor program known in this country for more than 30 years, has a well developed experiential philosophy that focuses on the metaphor of especially structured physical challenge activities that can transfer powerfully to a person’s life at home. Stephen Bacon in *The Conscious Use of Metaphor in Outward Bound* states that “it is the action—and not a conscious understanding which is fundamental to transferability.”⁸

While acknowledging the power of individual challenge experiences, it also is important to recognize the value of learning in the context of the group. The norms of giving constructive feedback as well as affirmation in structured processing of an experience gives individuals a reality check on their behavior and specific information they can use to implement change.

The power also lies in the holistic nature of wilderness challenge — it involves a person physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually and thus leaves an imprint in the psyche that is often indelible and more profound than what is learned through traditional and didactic methods of teaching.

Substantive research done by staff of Project Adventure, a long-time leader in the field of outdoor education, leads them to this conclusion: “...a series of well-designed adven-

turous activities which focus on success experiences will help a person to break the cycles of failure and bring about an increase in that person’s ability to feel good about himself. An enhanced ability to take the risks necessary for further growth will follow from this base.”⁹

Broad-based or Generic Approach

Though the first thoughts about LEAP were to provide a combination of summer wilderness adventure fun and “remedial academic” experience, it was not possible to do accurate assessments of the first LEAPers’ academic deficiencies and thus design a program to address them specifically. So focus turned to the broader goals of building self esteem, interactional skills, and a greater knowledge of the world that would expand the participants’ horizons of possibilities for their futures.

An early description of LEAP aimed at recruitment in local schools included these goals:

- Enhance students’ confidence, self esteem and interpersonal skills.
- Develop skills for problem solving.
- Learn to deal with stress and conflict without resorting to violence.
- Increase motivation to achieve in school and to reach life goals.
- Create opportunities for youth to make a contribution to the community.

The bottom line then, and now, is shifting the students’ image of

the possible — that includes a positive self-image and a positive image of possibilities in the world. If the messages from those around a student and from their experiences say “you can do it,” this will help to build a positive self image. To discover new abilities and strengths takes a willingness to risk and view occasional failures simply as part of the learning experience. (see “Can Do” Model, Figure 1, page 7.)

Value of the Natural World

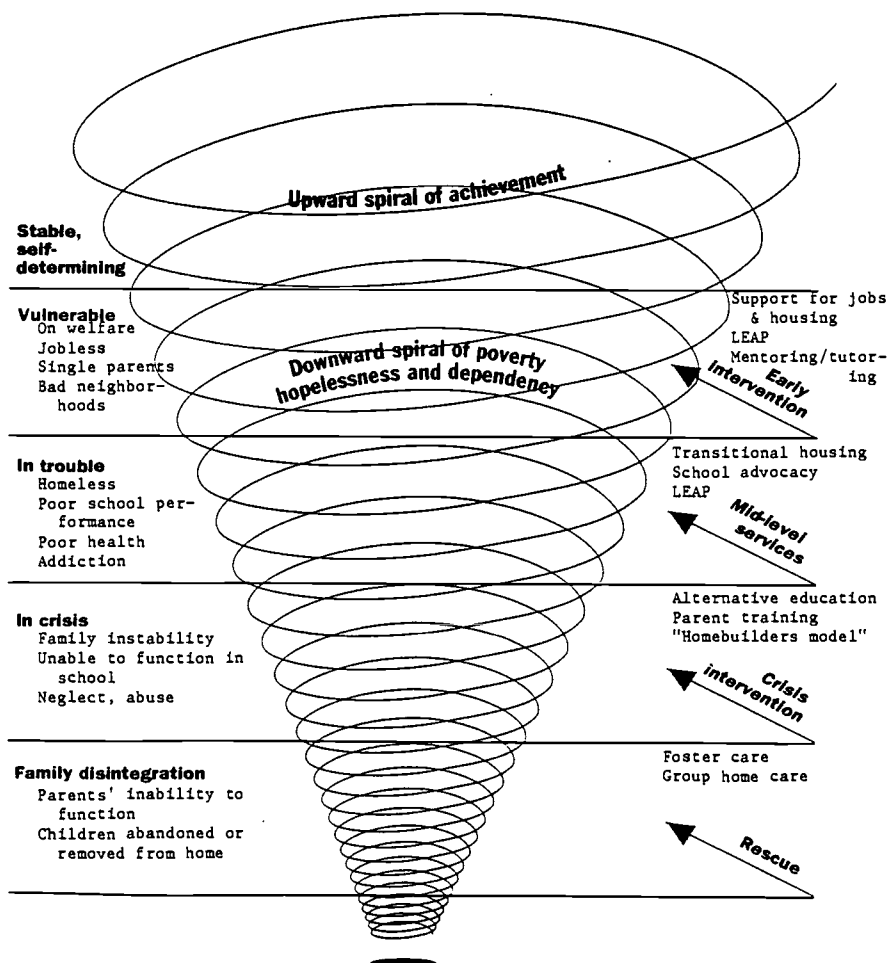
From the beginning, staff have had a strong bias toward learning in the natural world. However, staff soon discovered

“He (Pharoah, a young boy who lived in the ‘projects’ in Chicago) retreated regularly to the comfort of the lush lawns....the grass carpet offered a quiet resting place, it was like going to the beach....Pharaoh had long sought such a refuge....even an hour gave him a chance to catch his breath, to find the tranquillity he treasured....‘My mind be cleared of everything there.’”

from There Are No Children Here

by Alex Kotlowitz¹⁸

Figure 2: FLOC Intervention Model with Children and Families



This model demonstrates the life course that children and families in poverty are apt to take. It is a downward spiral beginning in a very general category of "vulnerable" characterized by:

- Low income
- Joblessness
- Dependent on welfare
- Single parenting
- Bad neighborhoods
- Birth deficits

The longer they stay "vulnerable," the more apt they are to continue in a downward spiral and no longer able to cope on a day-to-day basis. This next stage of increasing difficulties may be characterized by:

- Living in homeless shelters
- Poor school performance

- Addictions in family
- Poor health
- Conflict in family

Finally, if there has been no successful intervention in this cycle of poverty, deteriorating living conditions and hopelessness, the crisis stage is reached, characterized by:

- Severe family instability
- Abuse and neglect
- In trouble with the law
- Children removed from family
- Children unable to function in school

FLOC provides intervention at all levels of this spiral with the goal of offering the support and resources needed to reverse the cycle toward an upward spiral of healthy development.

that this setting that felt comfortable to them could be uncomfortable, as well as amazing and quite scary to many of the city youth. Nevertheless, the first-year staff persisted in the belief that this **wilderness place could be the best possible setting to have fun and learn** — and enjoyment of the woods and river and open spaces began to “rub off” on those first-year boys.

The frustration with bugs, no electricity in the cabins and being out in the weather, rain or shine, gave way to appreciation for the peace, the safety, the relative freedom and a feeling of familiarity with the creatures, the trees, the rocks and the stars. **The woods became a refuge for city kids traumatized by violence, threats to their lives, noise and physical and emotional deprivation.**

The phenomenon witnessed year after year is kids complaining about what’s physically hard like hiking and sleeping out on the ground on expeditions — yet, the next year they want to come back. Usually they say it’s to get away from the city, the noise and the shooting and because it’s peaceful in the woods.

Some very moving testimony to a city child’s instinctive longing for natural places comes from Robert Coles in his Introduction to *The Geography of Childhood* by Nabhan and Trimble. He speaks of interviewing a 12-year-old black girl in Boston who was dealing with the stress of a recently integrated school environment. She said, *“I wish I could walk out of that school and find myself a place where....I could walk and walk, and I’d be walking on grass, not cement with glass and garbage around; a place where there’d be the sky and the sun, and then the moon and all those stars....If I was there, I’d be able to talk the way I want, and I’d hear myself, because there wouldn’t be a lot of people listening and telling me what I said or what I should be saying.”*

Coles, who has become intimately familiar with the interior life of children through his decades of sensitive interviewing, observes: “that city girl tried to find for herself what all of us want and need to discover: a connection with the universe itself in all its various elements....All young people ache for nature in the way that Boston girl of a tenement house did, ache for nature as a part of their bread and water, their creaturely sustenance.”¹⁰

In this environment, then, it is also a natural setting for learning the values of respect for other creatures and for oneself, for learning tolerance in the web of interconnectedness true in any community. With endless opportunities for

exploration, self-initiated learning becomes a new pattern — observing something, asking questions, following one’s curiosity to find answers. This can be done with minimal structuring by adults. It is a way of learning how to learn, with adult guidance and faith in the child’s potential. **It is a way that affirms the child and his natural curiosity and abilities and, if well implemented, of building strengths and skills for coping with myriad challenges in the whole of life.**

“It is our natural state to be inquirers, doers, to be dissatisfied with the status quo, always striving for new horizons. Passiveness is an unnatural state that grows out of our loss of freedom.”¹¹ LEAP provides the special freedom of an outdoor environment. Experiential learning in the natural world is a way new for most youth in LEAP. Staff are the key to opening up new doors for these youth and it is critical to foster an understanding of experiential philosophy in staff working with LEAP.

(A more detailed description of our outdoor site and program components is found in Appendix I and II. The next section takes a look at results and what has been learned in eight years with LEAP.)



Giant’s Ladder — High Ropes Course



Part III — Results & Evaluations

EVALUATION PROCESS

“Evaluation at its best is a series of mental snapshots of always unfinished processes....leading to evolving but tentative conclusions about the worth of things we’re invested in and how best to improve them.”

...Lance Buhl in “The Evaluation Paradox”¹²

Goals for evaluation have been two-fold: 1) to **assess the progress of program participants** toward hoped-for outcomes; and 2) to **determine how effective particular methods have been** in facilitating the development of LEAP youth.

There are inherent challenges in this assessment: first, the ultimate goal of youth becoming fully functioning, contributing citizens in their community will not be known for some time yet; it is still a work in process. Second, it is difficult to say with certainty which of the many aspects of the program and services have been specifically effective in producing a particular outcome, e.g. to prove cause and effect.

While acknowledging this reality, staff have:

1. Administered assessment tools each year to obtain behavior and self-concept data.
2. Obtained narrative evaluations of LEAP youth and the LEAP camp program from camp staff.
3. Obtained school records for some youth and, on occasion, met with teachers and guidance counselors.
4. Talked with parents.
5. Obtained evaluations from youth.
6. Discussed among the staff observations and experiences of what works and what doesn’t work.

To get a long-term perspective on LEAP’s effectiveness, interviews were conducted beginning in the fall of 1995 with a number of parents and youth who had been involved with LEAP for several years as well as with camp staff involved three or more years.

OUTCOMES

Overview

When looking at the lives of LEAP youth after eight years, this is what stands out:

- The majority of youth want to continue with LEAP year after year. **The return rate has been from 60% to 75% each year.**
- Of youth continuing in LEAP three years or more, **only two have dropped out of school. The city dropout rate is about 50%.**
- Over seven years, of more than 65 girls, **only two have become pregnant.**
- **One youth has been incarcerated and two others arrested and released.**
- Four youth have been awarded Free the Children college scholarships if they finish high school and are accepted at a college. One has lost eligibility due to poor grades, but has persisted in his goal to graduate, is now working days and hopes to get his high school diploma in night school. One other has graduated from high school but has not made a decision to apply to college. The other two expect to graduate in 1997.

This is an **exceptionally positive picture compared with the city statistics for this population.** Perhaps most noteworthy of all is the continuing connection LEAP has with half of the first-year boys (six of 12) from 1988 and half of the first-year girls (five of 10) from 1989. Most of these 11 young people spent at least a year living in a homeless shelter. They are all from low-income families, most on public assistance. Their stories are about resisting the lure of the streets and negative peer pressure, staying in school and staying on track. They wanted to come back to camp because of the peace and quiet there, because they had friends there they could trust and because of learning about leadership and responsibility. In their words:

“It made me a leader, not just a follower.”

“I found out I could learn from failure and to just keep trying.”

“Where others don’t give me a chance, LEAP did.”

“When I got back to the city, I had learned to treat people differently — not bicker about little things.”

There are many more individual stories about overcoming personal challenges to stay in school and stay out of trouble on the streets. All but a few LEAP youth live in single-parent families with a mother. Most of the mothers struggle to keep the family together and food on the table, and frequently feel overwhelmed with concerns about their families. For them, LEAP offers a positive alternative to an unstruc-

tured life in the city in the summer, and gives them a respite from parenting for a few weeks. Here are some of their comments:

"LEAP adopts your children — other (programs) are just there for the summer, but LEAP is all year round; each year my child changed, started doing more things."

"What was hardest for my child was growing up without a father — it's not the money, it's the quality time that counts."

"The most beneficial thing about LEAP is the caring they (the kids) have for each other, because they see FLOC caring for them."

"LEAP teaches them self-respect and respect for others, problem solving; parents and staff people work together."

"They get a chance to do at camp things they don't do at home, and they can't wait for the next year to go to camp; everybody's teaching each other — if this person can do it, I can do it too!"

"The most positive thing about LEAP is that it gives them challenges and opportunities to try new things."

Return Rate/Continuity

Return rate refers to the percentage of campers each year who opt to return to LEAP camp the next summer. That has varied from year to year from **60% to 75%**. The highest number of dropouts has been after one or two years in LEAP. **When youth stay as long as three years, they tend to continue in the program.** The reasons for not continuing fall into these categories:

- moving away;
- going to summer school;
- participating in competing school-related activities, i.e. track or other sports competitions.
- visiting with out-of-town relative, or other personal conflict.

Some of the most able and high-functioning youth have dropped out after one or two

years, often because they opted for another attractive alternative, such as Double Dutch jump rope competition or spending the summer with a relative out of town. This suggests that LEAP may be most effective with the youth in more difficult circumstances.

A number of both boys and girls have dropped out for a year or two and then returned. This has been true of four of our first-year families.

Among the youth 14 and older who are called Junior Assistants (JA's), we had six to eight girls and six to eight boys participating each year from 1992 on. In addition, there are eight boys and girls over 18 who have continued to maintain

some contact with LEAP, even though they are no longer formally a part of the program. One of them applied and was hired as a cabin counselor for the LEAP camp in 1995.

What has kept so many youth voluntarily involved in LEAP for three or more years will be examined in the section "What Has Worked."

Behavior and Self Concept Data

Each year data is gathered on participants from self-report instruments and/or rating scales filled out by staff. The intent has been to obtain data using numerical scales as before-and-after measures of progress. Some of these results have been inconclusive in terms of documenting specific changes. However, the measures have been valuable guides when viewing all the data for any individual and identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses. These were the measures used:

Year 1—Administered the Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale, first day of camp and last day of camp; total scores showed an average increase of .67 points.

Years 2 & 3—Staff rated campers on a behavior checklist to aid in goal setting and assessing progress over time.

One of these youth, whom we will call Larry, lived in a shelter for a couple years. His mother left the shelter with no address while he was at camp his second year. From there he was passed from an 18-year-old brother to an aunt and then to other relatives and finally ended up in a group home. He had minor brushes with the law, lived in several group homes and was in a juvenile detention facility for most of a year. He was part of LEAP for five of these years and has continued to stay in touch and attend occasional reunions with the other boys from 1988. In 1993, he tested seriously behind grade level. In 1994, with stern support in a good group home, Larry started turning himself around, and by going to night school year-round for two years is in line to graduate in 1996. He also plays baseball, basketball, track, and was a star on his high school football team. Larry says about LEAP:

"LEAP has helped me deal better with pressure. On expeditions it was hard and you get frustrated—but that's like life and you gotta learn to deal with it. I learned a lot of teamwork and how to work together. Also, there was staff I always knew I could count on."

Year 4—Administered a portion (26 items) of the national American Association of University Women (AAUW) survey focusing on self-esteem (see *Appendix III for results*).

Years 5, 6 & 7—Staff rated campers on a revised behavior checklist, before and after camp.

Year 8—A nine-item assessment was developed in collaboration with an outside consulting organization and used by staff with older campers. On a scale of 1 to 5 from poor to excellent, the average rating on this behavioral measure was 3.8.

Also, at the end of camp in Year 8, the older campers rated what they had learned in specific goal areas. On a scale of 1 to 5 from nothing to a great deal, the students gave an average rating of 4.1.

Staff ratings on behavior checklists lacked consistency from year to year, as there was no way to control for counselor bias. Their chief value was as an assessment tool for staff doing year-round follow-up.

Perhaps the most interesting information from these assessments comes from the section of the AAUW self-esteem survey administered to 29 LEAP youth in 1991. It was given nationally to a sample of more than 3,000 elementary, junior high and high school students, with separate scoring for boys and girls. The comparison of **our student self-ratings with the national sample showed our students with higher ratings than the national sample** as a whole. African American girls rated themselves highest in the national sample, and ours rated themselves even higher. (*The tables in Appendix III show some interesting comparisons of LEAP boys and girls and with the national sample.*)

The other data gathered from staff, parents, teachers and counselors is part of each student's record and is used in setting goals for individual students and as a resource when parents request support for specific concerns.

WHAT HAS WORKED

From staff evaluations and parent and student feedback over the years, a picture emerges of key factors that have contributed most to the effectiveness of LEAP. These are:

- Intense summer activity with year-round follow-up.
- Long-term continuity from age 9 or 10 to 16 and older.
- Development of a positive peer group.
- Connection of staff with families.
- Sequencing programming to meet developmental needs at each level.
- Camp and outdoor expeditions provide:
 - natural environment that is a safe setting for varied activities;

- challenges that increase year by year;
- structure that includes goal setting, clear schedules and boundaries and consistent behavior management;
- staff role modeling and caring relationships that extend over time;
- diverse new activities that have transfer value back home.

As LEAP evolved, some of the original concepts have been fully implemented and some have not. The following comments focus on areas of recruitment, volunteers, connections with schools and families, plus major program pieces.

Recruitment – The age of 10 or 11 has proved to be the best age for starting the LEAP camp experience. Most youth who have started at 12 or 13 have dropped out after one or two years; they have more established friendships in the city and it may be harder for them to adapt to a new group. By contrast, the exceptions we have made for 9-year-olds have usually worked well, perhaps because most have been siblings of older campers.

Our criteria for recruiting new youth have been:

- Age 10 or 11
- From low-income families
- Living with at least one parent who is willing to cooperate with LEAP year-round
- Underachieving or having some difficulty in school, in need of additional support
- Not having serious difficulties or major behavioral problems
- Living (in recent years) in the Shaw neighborhood or reasonably close by.

The first two years recruiting primarily targeted homeless shelters. Since then, efforts have shifted to referrals from neighborhood schools and other community agencies and after-school programs. Families in homeless shelters often move to other areas of the city, making it difficult to follow-up with them year-round.

Partnering with other programs, like community after-school programs, means that the follow-up is shared; LEAP provides what they can't in the summer, and they maintain contact in ways that LEAP can't during the year. Follow-up is most feasible when it is neighborhood-focused; therefore, neighborhood recruiting has become our priority.

Volunteers – Since the plea for volunteer mentors after our first camp in 1988, LEAP has continued efforts to place adult mentors with LEAP youth. There have never been enough mentors, particularly since numbers of youth have grown to more than 50. When asking parents about the effectiveness of mentors, they have spoken highly of the value of that rela-



tionship. Mentors have been asked to make a commitment of at least a year and spend time with their mentee a couple of times a month.

Parents most appreciate those who have encouraged them with school work or taken them to educational events, plays, museums, etc. Some mentors have continued their commitment for four years or more. Others have dropped out after a few months. Still others have maintained only occasional contacts, plus attending LEAP parties and picnics.

Other volunteers have been used to help with big events or monthly in-town activities with youth. Special resource people have also volunteered a day or more time to assist in staff training at camp or with special activities at camp. Occasionally, we have had a full-time volunteer on the camp staff. The volunteer program has been most limited by lack of staff time for recruitment, supervision and support of mentors. Also, the screening and application process for mentors typically takes several weeks, and there are frequent dropouts before the process is completed.

Volunteers add a valuable dimension to LEAP. They provide another link to the community, expand the youths' world beyond what staff can provide, and they benefit from the relationships they form with youth and families and what they learn in the process.

Schools – From the beginning, LEAP has worked on collaborative relations with the schools in several ways: recruitment of youth; offering leadership development programs in

local schools; and communicating with school personnel about LEAP youths' needs.

- School guidance personnel in local elementary schools have been open to making referrals of children, especially those with problems they think might be helped by LEAP. As our resources for year-round follow-up have been limited, we have tended to do more of our recruiting with neighborhood after-school programs.
- Schools in the neighborhood of FLOC have been very enthusiastic about the 6-week LEAP leadership development programs we offered to students in 1989-1991. These helped school personnel understand LEAP methods, and some of those youth were then recruited for camp. These programs were funded by a special foundation grant.
- LEAP's initial goal was to obtain school grades and attendance records for all LEAP youth, monitor their school progress, and offer them and their parents support in advocating for their special needs with the schools. With logistical challenges of LEAPers scattered throughout the city and with limited staff, this has not been possible, though staff have responded to parents' requests for help. If staff learn of special difficulties, they talk with the parents, with school personnel and set up meetings in which they support the parents in their requests for special testing or other needs.

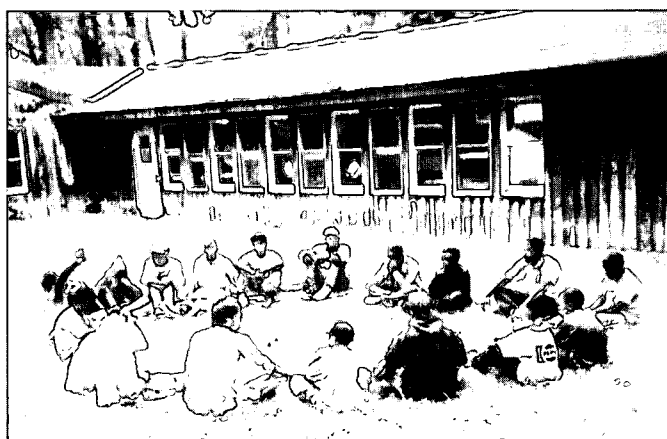
Families – For five of the past eight years LEAP has employed a family/child services coordinator who has had responsibility for maintaining contact with families by phone and personal visit, for visiting schools to obtain records and advocate for LEAP youth, and to recruit, train and support volunteer mentors. This has been critical to a full follow-up program. Since most of LEAP families are on public assistance and have many concerns related to jobs, housing, health services, etc., LEAP has attempted to fill the gap between their needs and what has been provided by the city through their social worker. Principally, this has been listening to their needs and making referrals to available resources. Monthly parent meetings also provided a forum for several years for sharing concerns and resource ideas.

Summer Programs – The adventure camp, outdoor challenge expeditions and Junior Assistant program for older campers have been the bedrock of the LEAP program over the years. It started with one three-week camp for boys, adding a camp for girls the second year and an expedition for the oldest group the third year. The Junior Assistant program was then added for youth 14 and older. This established pat-

tern has continued since then. The single sex camps have worked very well. Most staff believe they are preferable to coed camps because each group feels freer to just be girls or just be boys without the distraction of the opposite sex. Girls do not take a back seat to boys in physical activities, and boys do not try to impress the girls with macho behavior.

Each year at the end of camp, staff completed an evaluation on each child and also a general evaluation of camp. A full day was devoted to a general evaluation session with all the staff, reviewing what worked well and what needed to be added or changed. This data was used the next year in developing the summer program. Staff evaluations for the years 1992-1995 were collated, and responses to the question, "What was most beneficial about camp?" identified five areas of greatest benefit:

1. Diverse, new activities experienced.
2. Quality of staff, staff relationships with campers, low staff/camper ratio.
3. Adventure challenge activities, leadership and teamwork learned.
4. Individual attention, love and caring given to campers.
5. Well-planned structure, schedule, consistency and discipline.



Also mentioned were: learning to live in community, learning to accept responsibility, working toward clear goals and spending time in a safe, natural environment.

The key question asked by staff (and by others) is: "What difference does this two- or three-week summer experience make for the camper in the rest of his/her life?" From talking to parents and careful observation over time, **what they experience is a new model of cooperation and working out differences and of mutual support and accountability that gives them tools for dealing with personal challenges and conflict. New experiences in a setting that is safe and peaceful give them a wider view of what is possible and what their choices are in life and increases their sense of personal responsibility in making choices. This does not happen immediately, but when it is reinforced over the course of three or more years, it can have profound carryover effects.**

Expeditions provide peak experiences and additional challenge for older youth that profoundly affect their views of themselves

and their strengths. They not only build confidence, but also diverse skills, both practical and interpersonal. The bonding nature of the experience cements friendships and builds investment in the group in continuing together. When older campers gather for reunions, it is the hardships endured and triumph over seemingly impossible obstacles on expeditions that are the topics of reminiscing. There is a shared pride in these adventures and achievements that carries over the years.

Perhaps more than any other aspect of LEAP the high adventure outdoor activities of expeditions, rock climbing, caving, kayaking and high ropes course tap into the youths' potential for outstanding performance, for going far beyond what they or anyone else had imagined they could achieve. Staff have witnessed over and over the seeming paradox of the

youth with the most difficult behavior rising to the greatest challenge, often choosing the most difficult route and leading their peers to great achievement, both physical and emotional. One cannot predict in advance who will shine in the most challenging activities, but over the years staff have come to count on being wonderfully surprised.

Because of the intensity of the high adventure experiences and the recollections of participants

years later, we are convinced that there is a high degree of transference from these peak experiences to their everyday life in the city. In the words of one LEAPer, "If I can climb a 30-foot rock face, I guess I can write a 30-page paper."

The *Junior Assistant (JA)* program of the last four years has required a major portion of staff time. It has been absolutely essential to staying connected with youth 14 and older. The primary challenges have been in four areas: 1) working with the city's summer youth employment program for planning beginning in February and coordinating with them through the summer; 2) managing the JA's in camp, where their time is split between work responsibilities and their own camp activities; 3) building collaborative relationships with community groups around service projects for JA's; 4) developing a process of accountability where campers have to meet certain criteria in order to be a much-desired JA.

To be successful, a JA program requires much planning, orientation and training in advance of the summer, a commensurate commitment of funding and of staff time for plan-

ning and supervision of the summer program and investment and ownership by participants. When all of these ingredients are present, the payoff can be great. **This is the key-stone for adolescents in making the transition from patterns of dependency to independence through mastering basic job skills along with their education.**

Staff – Crucial to every aspect of LEAP are the quality and commitment of staff. LEAP presents a daunting challenge to full-time year-round staff, as well as to short-term summer staff. The program seeks people comfortable in the outdoors, experienced with youth (if possible, high-risk inner-city youth), with high levels of energy, commitment and maturity, and who are willing to learn new and difficult things and available for long days and nights of work.

In addition to the summer camp staff hired for three to six weeks (*see Appendix II*), year-round staff have included up to five full-time and two part-time year-round staff: a director, assistant director, family/child services coordinator, outdoor challenge specialist and youth specialist full-time; secretary and site manager, both about half-time. These year-round staff have also assumed responsibility for Outdoor Education Center programming with groups other than LEAP. A pool of adjunct staff have also assisted with these programs, as well as some LEAP programs.

Fortunately for LEAP, many talented and committed staff have been attracted to the program because of the challenge it presents. One summer staffer has come back for seven years from Memphis, Tennessee; another summer staffer from 1989-1991 returned in 1995 as a special counselor at boys camp and is

currently part of the year-round staff.

The keys to building an effective staff and, thus, an effective summer program have been:

1. Giving staff a realistic advance knowledge about LEAP and what the outdoor experience requires.
2. A director experienced with youth, well-versed in experiential education methods, team building and management skills.
3. Staff training that includes clear goal-setting and sharing philosophy, values and assumptions about youth and effective learning, and methods for accomplishing goals.
4. Focused team building during staff training and adequate support throughout camp.

Conclusion

Evaluation of LEAP is a continual process. The current program has been developed beyond the original concepts, to meet the needs of LEAP youth as they pass from elementary school to junior high to high school. Although goals for a comprehensive family support program have not been fully met, staff do maintain contact with families throughout the year and the majority maintain their interest in staying with LEAP year after year.

LEAP is clearly on the right track, starting with youth around age 10 and offering continuing support until graduation from high school. Numbers have not been large, but instead, each LEAP youth has been given much individual attention. To what extent this is an effective strategy will not be fully known until these youth are adults.

“Back in DC, if somebody needs help, I’d help them.

FLOC camp helped me decide to do that.”

fourth year LEAP boy, age 15



*LEAP Boys
Camp Staff*

Part IV — Where Do We Go From Here?

NEEDS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Recent major reports from the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development¹³ and the American Youth Policy Forum¹⁴ leave no doubt that reaching adolescents early is critical if they are to successfully meet the challenges to their healthy development and make wise choices for their future.

In the city of Washington, DC, the need for adolescent support programs is even greater than many other cities because of the city's financial crisis and severe curtailing of city services, including youth programs. At the same time, LEAP has established a reputation in the city for innovative work with adolescents and is actively seeking to establish more collaborative relationships with other community-based agencies, as well as public/private partnerships.

Plans are going forward in LEAP's parent agency, For Love of Children (FLOC) for completion of the Thurgood Marshall Center, a project to renovate, restore and reopen the historic Twelfth Street YMCA a few blocks from FLOC. This will be FLOC's new home and will provide neighborhood-based comprehensive family support services. Having a neighborhood center for a range of activities for youth and their families will greatly expand the possibilities of year-round activities for LEAP in the city and will make LEAP and its powerful adventure programming accessible to all young people in the neighborhood.

There are also possibilities for further expansion at LEAP's wilderness site. The development restrictions at the site do allow for construction of more cabins, and the current facilities are not being fully utilized year-round. So there is the potential for considerable growth in numbers.

The challenges and opportunities for LEAP are great. LEAP has the basic resources to meet the needs for sound adolescent programs: being part of a social service agency with a 30-year established reputation, having an in-city center, a wilderness camp facility and a powerful methodology for experiential education, tested and validated over the years. The need to reverse school dropout and delinquency is critical and growing. Continuing to develop the vision and the resources are the major challenge for the future.



REPLICABILITY

The combination of the solid backing of a broad-based social service agency and the long-term lease quasi-ownership of an outstanding 240-acre wilderness site with facilities close to the city significantly helped LEAP develop. These favorable circumstances may not be common; however, this program can still be replicated.

It is possible to take the key elements of LEAP programming and translate those to other situations. The basic format of intensive summer adventure activities out of the city, combined with year-round follow-up back in the city can be replicated in a number of ways. What is important is the continuity of programming, with regular reinforcement of the principles and skills learned.

The specific activities and the specific focus are probably not as important to the LEAP model and replication of it as: 1) incorporating structured challenge; 2) providing year-round continuity; and 3) continuing long-term support for three or more years. Beyond that, staff have felt that most important are strong adult role models and relationships, increasing challenges each year, providing clear boundaries and discipline, unconditional caring (you can mess up and come back), strong peer support and focusing on goal setting. In staffs' own words:

"LEAP provided them a sense of belonging. There was always the anticipation that someone was there who cared about you."

"They learned to trust some people they didn't know....their world view can change—they can see that in the right conditions they can get along with lots of kinds of people."

"Kids respond to the challenge at camp—even though they hate it a lot of the time, when I ask them later to do something really challenging, they're up for trying it."

"The thing is just to try something....it was find your own level of challenge. Kids come to respect that in each other and to celebrate someone else achieving their own goal."

"(At camp) it was OK to express yourself and OK to care about others. The environment they were in was safe and that was allowing them to be who they are. A lot came out, and a lot of that was because of the peace they found."

Appendix

I. SITE DESCRIPTION

The wilderness site, briefly described under “FLOC History” p. 5, is located about eight miles from the main road west from Leesburg, VA to Charles Town, WV. It is hard to imagine in the highly populated mid-Atlantic corridor a site so accessible (one and a half hours’ driving time) to a large city and yet only minimally developed and retaining many characteristics of more remote areas. There is a great abundance of deer, wild turkeys and even bobcats, as well as a number of rare species of wetlands wild orchids and trilliums.

The terrain is varied, from rolling woodlands with numerous creeks, to the steep slope leading to the Appalachian Trail. The Shenandoah River is close to the boundaries of the property.

FACILITIES

- Original facilities in 1988 included:
- Main building - indoor dining & meeting area for up to 50 people, plus kitchen, laundry room, offices and bathrooms;
- Shower house;
- Campsite with four cabins sleeping five people each, covered pavilion and outdoor cooking area, campfire circle and storage shed;
- Trailer with three bedrooms.

Since then, the following have been added:

- Second campsite with four cabins sleeping 24, plus pavilion;
- Multi-purpose activities and storage building;
- Lodge sleeping 18, with meeting space, kitchen and central fireplace;
- High and low ropes course. *Note:* These ropes courses are a key element for programming. The low ropes course consists of a series of elements close to the ground, constructed of wood, cables, ropes and other such materials, often attached to trees. Each one presents a challenge to the group to accomplish a particular physical goal. The high ropes course consists of challenge events some distance off the ground, that require participants to be hooked into a belay system, in order to climb or traverse events safely.

A most important feature of the site is that it is remote from any vestige of city life, such as television, automobile

traffic or stores. Being free of these distractions is a very important aspect of totally shifting focus for youth (or adults) who spend time there. The remoteness is also a deterrent for a rebellious youth who might consider running away to get back home.

The LEAP program has been shaped by this site in a number of ways:

- The existing cabins had no plumbing or electricity, a special challenge for city youth.
- Each cabin had room for four or five people. This prescribed from the start the size of each “family” within the community of the camp.
- There are no swimming pools or basketball courts, as in more traditional camps, but the opportunity to swim (with life jackets) in the river and play field games like soccer and “New Games.”¹⁵
- Being part of a much larger (1,600 acre) tract of land owned by the Rolling Ridge Foundation, creates a buffer area for the camp and provides extensive opportunity for exploring and hiking beyond camp, as well as overnight camping in the woods and rock climbing at a nearby site on the Appalachian Trail.
- The primitive cabins have afforded opportunity for LEAPers to embellish and improve them with shelves and various decorations. They have built bird blinds in the woods and have worked on a log cabin and other projects that help them claim this place as their own.
- Finally, the entire Rolling Ridge Foundation lands are protected from all future development by a strict conservation easement enforced by the Trust for Appalachian Trail Lands in return for their support in purchasing the last 600 acres added to the Foundation Lands in 1995. This guarantees preservation of the wilderness aspect for the FLOC acreage and surrounding land for the future.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

There are three distinct parts of LEAP:

1. Intensive summer activities: in-camp, expedition, and jobs program.
2. Year-round activities with youth and sometimes parents or families.
3. Mentoring, school advocacy and family support,

What follows are descriptions of the main program components in each of these areas:

1. SUMMER ACTIVITIES

LEAP Camp – Summer sessions at the FLOC wilderness site include youth from 9 to 16-year-olds, and occasionally older. Recruiting each year focuses on 10 and 11-year-olds. Most of the 9-year-olds admitted have been younger siblings of current campers. LEAP started with a three-week session for 12 boys. The second year expanded to 15 boys for three weeks and added a two-week session for 10 girls. Each year since then there have been two-week in-camp sessions for boys and girls, with the numbers increasing to a maximum of about 30 in each of these two sessions.

Activities have varied somewhat from year to year, with staff offering special interest workshops in areas of their expertise, as well as certain activities that have been standard most years. The standard activities have been:

- New games
- Swimming in the river
- Field sports like kickball, soccer, touch football, etc.
- LEAP Olympics (all-camp field day including fun relays, water games, etc.)
- Hikes - from one to six miles
- Overnight campouts
- Low ropes course activities
- High ropes course
- Arts and crafts
- Carpentry projects
- Journaling
- Skits and performances for Parents Day
- Nature study
- Visit to Harpers Ferry (20 miles away)

Additional activities have been offered each year by staff or sometimes visiting resource people. They range widely from special arts like dance and mask making, to Black history and world geography, to producing a camp newspaper and making videos and other educational activities. Some additional adventure activities have been offered like caving, kayaking or rock climbing, and in recent years, rites of passage activities have been added.

Structure – Each cabin has four or five campers with a staff cabin counselor. Some activities are scheduled for the whole camp and some for sub-groups. Cabin groups take turns preparing breakfast for the whole camp and doing camp chores. Activities are sometimes scheduled by age groups, with Junior Campers (9 to 11) at one, Senior Campers (12

and 13) doing something else and JA's (14 and up) helping supervise activities or doing some special project. Cabin groups usually spend at least two or three hours a day together. Evening campfires are a time for the whole camp to gather, reflect on the day, tell stories and sing. It's an important time for building the cohesiveness and spirit of the camp.

Parents Day is always the last day of camp. Parents (and a number of younger siblings) are brought out by van from the city to visit and gain a better understanding of what happens at camp. They are given tours of the camp and see what their children have been doing and making. There is an awards ceremony and usually some performances by the campers. There may be dancing, musical numbers, poetry reading or demonstrations of some of the activities at camp. The grand finale is a generous country-style lunch, after which they all return to the city.

Staffing – For the single-sex camp sessions, primarily staff of the same gender have been recruited three-week periods, two weeks of camp plus one week of staff training. Most years, two or three women have been included on the boys camp staff to assist with programming and also a couple men on girls camp staff, when available. Recruitment has been done primarily through job listings at colleges, with notices also posted in local churches, schools and other organizations.

There has generally been a larger pool of better qualified female applicants than males. Also, there has been a higher repeat rate of female than male staff. The qualifications we look for are: over 20, high school graduate, previous experience with youth and preferably inner-city youth, previous camp experience or orientation to the outdoors, and a special interest and/or education in psychology, social work, education or a related field.

Some years the Outdoor Education Center's assistant director has been the camp director; other years we have hired directors just for the summer. The majority of directors have been teachers or have had a background in education.

Continuity of staff has been an issue over the years. Only one director has served two years in a row. The average turnover of other camp staff has been over 50%, giving us a major recruiting job each year. It also means a greater need for staff training each year. On the other hand, most have been well qualified and committed staff. The majority have been college students, though a fair number have been college graduates — teachers or professionals in transition. A few have had no college at all but have had other special qualifications or abilities. For instance, in 1995 we hired one of our first year LEAP boys who had graduated from high school.

Expeditions – In the third year, eight boys who were repeat LEAPers and at least 12 years old embarked on the first week-long expedition. They needed an additional challenge and more varied experience than a repeat of camp could give them. Since then, expeditions have become the ultimate LEAP experience. They have usually been scheduled just ahead of the in-camp session. Girls and boys have done separate expeditions.

Activities have included backpacking, canoeing, ropes course activities, travel to neighboring states, rock climbing and service projects. Away from the usual supports of camp, with adequate but limited food, clothing and supplies, youth learn to plan, share responsibilities and cooperate in a new way. There are many opportunities for leadership. Staff allow them to make mistakes and learn from them; consequences are usually immediate and direct. If someone is careless packing food and the honey leaks out of the container all through their pack, they will have a very messy clean-up job — plus, everyone else is mad at that person because there is no more honey!

There are many highs and lows for the group on expedition, and both usually contribute to a true bonding experience for participants. This bonding can last for years, and in LEAP it has. It is part of the motivation that has kept many youth coming back year after year — a shared experience of adversity, triumph and just plain fun.

Jobs Program – By the age of 14 the boys who had been in LEAP for three or four years felt opposing pulls. They wanted to continue with LEAP in the summer, and at the same time they wanted to be part of the six-week summer jobs program in the city. Earning money was paramount in their minds. To respond to this new need, we developed an arrangement with the city to be a designated job site for the DC summer youth employment program and gave the older youth specific leadership and job responsibilities at camp, for which they were paid by the city. When they got home in the summer, they then were given continuing responsibilities that were monitored by LEAP staff.

Goals for the LEAP jobs program are:

1. Continue to build a positive peer support group.
2. Provide job orientation and skills training to ensure success in summer jobs.
3. Develop age-appropriate summer jobs and supervise youth in a six-week job program.
4. Include community service projects that youth help design as part of program.
5. Further develop skills and confidence for problem-solving and conflict resolution.

It has taken much experimenting and refining to make a six-week jobs program work. City regulations need to be followed, which prescribe a four-hour work day. At camp, then, these “Junior Assistants” (JA’s) have had a role that is both a part of camp and apart from younger campers. They assist staff in leading activities with the rest of camp. They have separate JA activities (both jobs and recreation), and at times also participate in whole-camp events. They sleep in separate cabins, eat at separate tables in the dining room, and younger campers often look up to them and look forward to the day when they can be JA’s.

The expeditions have counted as training experience for JA’s and so are required, as well as providing pay for the JA’s. The three-week in-city program requires considerable staff time to develop community service projects. This usually means building collaborative relationships with other organizations to provide a variety of experiences for the youth. For instance, MANNA, a low-income housing development organization in DC., has provided some days of carefully monitored work at housing job sites. JA’s have supervised and led games for younger children in day programs. Visits to the Washington Post and the Martin Luther King Library have enriched their knowledge of the city and resources available to them.

In any new program with older youth, their input is sought at the outset and their participation in the planning and implementing is crucial if it is to be successful. In advance of becoming JA’s, basic job orientation and skills are stressed in pre-summer sessions. Resource people in the community come and talk to the youth, giving them facts about their choices, emphasizing basic employer requirements and helping them see the range of possibilities open to them.

The JA program is very staff intensive, and we need to continue testing ways to maximize this opportunity with mid-teens who need to see clear ways to earn money that also build toward a positive future.

2. YEAR-ROUND ACTIVITIES

Some of these events and activities have been structured for whole families to participate, some for specific groups of children, and some for just parents.

WHOLE GROUP EVENTS

The Holiday Party. The most popular event has probably been the LEAP Christmas party. Mothers, grandmothers, seldom-seen fathers, lots of younger siblings, aunts,

cousins and friends all converge with the LEAP youth, staff and volunteers to take part in this holiday celebration. We invite families to bring food to share; we do Christmas crafts (adults are as enthusiastic about this as children), trim a tree, eat a magnificent lunch, have a program of music or readings by family members (sometimes parents, sometimes youth) sing carols, and each family leaves with a bag of gifts that have been provided by FLOC through donations from the community.

It is the one time during the year that all of these people are present at the same time and interacting across age levels and roles. There are always infants who occupy a special spotlight, with people begging to hold them. There is lots of picture taking, including family portraits by the Christmas tree. One year a mother brought a Santa Claus cake she had made that was over four feet long. It is THE EVENT of the LEAP community and gives a rare sense of who this community is.

The Fall Picnic. This has been a gathering primarily for all the LEAP children and volunteers, though a couple years parents were invited as well. When parents come on such an occasion, some bring younger children as well. The intent of the picnic has been as a sort of “kick off” for the year-round program. It brings the youth together with the new friends they had recently made at camp, and it gives mentors a chance to meet each other in a relaxed atmosphere and to see their mentees in a different light, interacting with other children.

The picnic has usually been best attended by the younger LEAPers (under 14). It seems that the setting of the park and its activities is “kid stuff” to many of the older youth, who are more interested in peer age gatherings with activities geared more to their interests.

The FLOC Walk. This is a service opportunity for LEAP youth. It is generally held once a year as a public fund raiser and has participants from organizations all over the city, as well as FLOC youth and adults. Since it is difficult for LEAP youth to recruit supporters who will pledge money for their walking, it is promoted as an opportunity for board members and other supporters to pledge specific sponsorship for the LEAP kids.

LEAP youth walk with board members or other people from the community, who get to hear snatches of their stories. Supporters see the faces of those benefiting from the dollars they contribute. And LEAPers get to spend a day with their friends. It is a time when LEAPers can truly feel part of the larger picture that includes the rest of FLOC, community supporters and people on the street in Washington, DC.

Small Group Activities for Youth

Each year LEAP schedules day-long or weekend events throughout the year for groups of just girls, just boys, older boys and girls together, or special interest group activities. The intent has been to keep the connections going between peers and between youth and staff and provide new experiences, visit new places, learn about the wider world and have fun.

The first couple of years, when numbers were small, staff planned reunion weekends at camp with all the boys or all the girls. As the group increased to 40 or more, other types of in-town activities and short trips were offered on a voluntary sign-up basis.

For the past two years, the primary focus for year-round youth activities has been an Adventure Club offering monthly activities for older youth. They are able to get to FLOC by public transportation, and they have developed strong peer relationships within the group, which is part of their motivation to participate. Activities include cross-country skiing, hiking and backpacking, attendance at special athletic events, overnight trips to visit nearby colleges and community service projects.

With the addition of the winterized lodge at camp, LEAP youth have had work parties and weekend retreats at camp throughout the winter. LEAP's goal is to provide more of these small group activities year-round for the whole age range of LEAP youth.

3. MENTORING, SCHOOL ADVOCACY AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Mentoring – The initial plea for volunteers to help support youth and families produced about 10 men and women from a local church congregation. They visited the shelters where the families lived. They took them swimming and to movies and museums. Some worked to help them find housing or health services. Others became discouraged and continued only a few months.

Recruiting mentors through churches, college community service programs, and FLOC newsletters was tried. Eventually, FLOC hired a volunteer coordinator who has recruited, screened, and provided orientation for mentors for LEAP and other FLOC programs. LEAP criteria for mentors have been: 1) commitment for at least one year to visit with mentor twice a month; 2) interested in youth between the ages of 10 and 16 (though some stay with youth up to 18); 3) willing to keep in communication with LEAP staff about the mentor.



Since there have never been enough mentors for all of LEAP youth, priorities have been to place mentors with: 1) the youth whose parents specifically request them; 2) youth who are having difficulties and need extra support; and 3) youth who have requested mentors themselves.

School Advocacy – From LEAP’s early days, the role of the program has been seen as supportive of the child’s whole educational/developmental process. The summer wilderness experience can have a high impact on the child. Our goal has been to maintain continuity throughout the year and have good communication with the school from our perspective of knowing the child in a different educational situation.

When LEAP numbers were small, with parents’ permission, staff obtained school grade and attendance records for all of the youth. The intention was to monitor them and offer our support when problems arose.

Many parents never talked to teachers or knew what their rights were in situations calling for special testing or special placement.

In a number of situations, staff encouraged parents to contact teachers and other school personnel when there was a problem or they didn’t understand what was going on. LEAP staff, when requested, accompanied parents to meetings with teachers and other school personnel. In some cases, staff provided information to lawyers advocating for special placements for youth. Primarily, staff have been involved when the parents needed support in their interactions with the schools.

Family Support – Primary contacts with families have been:

1) *Recruitment* – Meeting with parents of new campers, giving them a full explanation of what LEAP involves, what is asked of them, and what LEAP provides for their child. LEAP asks for their commitment in preparing them for camp, getting them to FLOC, attending parents day at camp and the LEAP Christmas party and responding to communications from LEAP staff. Also they are asked for written permission to obtain school records and to photograph or video their children.

2) *Returning campers* must get camp physicals and complete a registration process.

3) *Ongoing contact* – Parents are contacted throughout the year when special events are planned for their children.

Parents are specifically invited to parents day at camp, the Christmas party and for occasional special events like the FLOC fund-raising walk. For a few years staff held monthly parent meetings, with mixed success. Many parents live a long distance from FLOC and many have a number of younger children to care for; others simply are not interested. Meeting programs have included parenting practices, AIDs education, knowing city resources and discussion of special concerns about their children.

The years when LEAP has been able to employ a Family/Child Services Coordinator, that person has attempted to visit families, who request it, on a regular basis. This has been important to keep track of the children and their special needs; it builds a trust relationship with the parents; and parents are often guided toward resources for their whole family’s needs. Staff have operated on the belief that

whatever can be done to support the parents and family will directly benefit the child LEAP is committed to support.

“I was really scared when I first went to LEAP — scared of everything and everybody, but I hung in with it. It showed me that everything can come together if you’re willing to work with others — and if you believe in yourself.”

— fourth year LEAP boy, age 15

III. ASSESSMENT TOOLS

As noted in Part III – Results & Evaluation, the assessments of LEAP youth consisted of 1) narrative written assessments made by staff; 2) self-report instruments completed by the youth; 3) assessment checklists filled out by

staff; and 4) verbal assessments obtained from staff and sometimes from parents, mentors and teachers.

Included in this appendix are:

1. a sample of behavior checklists used from 1989 through 1994 (Figure 3);
2. assessment checklist used by staff in 1995 (Figure 4);
3. brief description of results of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale used in 1988, at the beginning of camp and again three weeks later at the end of camp (Figure 5);
4. results of segment of AAUW national survey of self-esteem, administered to LEAP youth in 1991 (Figures 6, 7 and 8).

Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale

This was administered to the 12 LEAP boys on the first day of camp in July, 1988, and again the last day of camp.

Figure 3: SAMPLE OF BEHAVIOR CHECKLISTS USED FROM 1989 THROUGH 1994

BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST

Name of child _____ Grade in school _____
 Date of birth _____ Sex _____
 Name of person completing checklist _____
 Relationship to child _____ Date completed _____

For each of the behaviors below, please circle the number in the column next to it that best describes how usual that behavior is for that child.

1. Makes friends easily with other children.	0	1	2	3	4	?
2. Responds cooperatively to teachers and staff.	0	1	2	3	4	?
3. Able to keep friends among peers.	0	1	2	3	4	?
4. Has an optimistic, cheerful attitude.	0	1	2	3	4	?
5. Accepts not getting own way.	0	1	2	3	4	?
6. Expresses feelings in a socially acceptable way.	0	1	2	3	4	?
7. Attempts to solve own problems constructively.	0	1	2	3	4	?
8. Cooperative in group & willing to support others.	0	1	2	3	4	?
9. Self confident, expresses a liking for him/herself.	0	1	2	3	4	?
10. Shows pride and satisfaction with achievements.	0	1	2	3	4	?
11. Resolves differences without fighting or using profane language.	0	1	2	3	4	?
12. Uses language well to communicate.	0	1	2	3	4	?
13. Finishes things; does not give up easily.	0	1	2	3	4	?
14. Comfortable talking in front of a group.	0	1	2	3	4	?
15. Accepts criticism as well as praise.	0	1	2	3	4	?
16. Is curious and inquisitive; asks questions.	0	1	2	3	4	?
17. Demonstrates initiative (in and out of classroom).	0	1	2	3	4	?
18. Accepts responsibility.	0	1	2	3	4	?
19. Respects the rights of others.	0	1	2	3	4	?

Figure 4. Behavior Checklist used in 1995

BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST
(Version for Camp Counselors)

Student Name _____

Counselor Name _____ Date _____

Based on your knowledge of this student, indicate in Column A the degree to which the student has the following characteristics. Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "not at all" and 5 meaning "very much." In Column B indicate whether the rating represents improvement since the beginning of camp.

COLUMN A: Characteristics	COLUMN B: Has there been improvement since the beginning of camp?	COLUMN A: Characteristics	COLUMN B: Has there been improvement since the beginning of camp?
1. Acknowledges strengths and weaknesses Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	6. Is able to set goals and follow through on them. Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Accepts not getting his/her own way. Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	7. Finishes things, does not give up easily Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Self-confident, expresses liking for him/herself. Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	8. Cooperative in the group and willing to support others. Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Resolves differences without fighting or using profane language. Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	9. Makes contributions that benefit the whole. Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Communicates thoughts effectively Not at all very much 1 2 3 4 5 Comments:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

Figure 5 shows the increases/decreases pre- and post-test in each of the six sub-scales. Six boys showed increases in total scores; five showed decreases and one showed no change in total score. The average of each boys total score gain/loss showed an increase of .67. The sub-scale showing the greatest increase was “intellectual and school status.” This might be explained by the daily reading and writing in areas of great interest to them. The decreases on the sub-scales of “physical appearance and attributes” and “happiness and satisfaction” could be due to becoming more casual about grooming and care of clothes after three weeks in the woods and perhaps coming to some acknowledgment of the harsh realities of their lives, where there had been denial before.

The psychologist who assisted us with administration and scoring of the Piers-Harris was not available after the first year, so we did not continue using it.

Figure 5. Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale	
Administered to 12 Subjects, July-August, 1988	
<u>Sub-scale</u>	<u>Average Gain/Loss</u>
I. Behavior	+.25
II. Intellectual and School Status	+.67
III. Physical Appearance and Attributes	-.42
IV. Anxiety	+.25
V. Popularity	+.25
VI. Happiness and Satisfaction	-.33

SEGMENT OF AAUW “EDUCATIONAL EQUITY STUDY”

A sub-set of 26 items from this national study was administered at both boys and girls camp in 1991. The full instrument of 92 items was administered to about 3,000 children between grades four and ten, in twelve locations nationwide in the fall of 1990. The researchers for AAUW, Greenberg Lake, took random samples across each cluster of states, with numbers proportionate to the number of school children in each region.

Comparisons of some of the key statements are shown on the following charts. There are some very significant differences between LEAP boys and girls (whose average age is just under 11) and girls and boys in the national study.

Comparison data is taken from the Executive Summary of the report, which only cites differences by age group for a few questions. The other comparisons are with the entire sample, which averages responses from elementary, middle school and high school. Full data by age was not available.

For each of the 26 statements used there is a choice of one of five responses:

- always true
- sort of true
- sometimes true/sometimes false
- sort of false
- always false

Statistics in the charts show only the percentage checking “always true.”

There are five core statements most closely related to self-esteem. Of these, the statement “I’m happy the way I am.” is compared in **Figure 6**. It is the only statement showing a breakdown by age and race for girls in the summary. ¹⁷

Figure 7 shows a comparison of responses to the five core statements between LEAP girls and boys and the AAUW total sample of girls and boys. Since scores in the AAUW sample dropped significantly for girls from elementary school to high school and somewhat for boys, as well, the total sample figures shown will be generally lower than their subset for elementary school.

Figure 8 shows a comparison of responses related to school work and teachers.

It is very interesting to note the statements on which LEAP’s gender differences are the reverse of the national sample:

“I’m good at math.”			
LEAP girls -	46%	LEAP boys -	33%
AAUW girls -	21%	AAUW boys -	34%

“Sometimes I don’t like myself that much.”			
LEAP boys -	23%	LEAP girls -	13%
AAUW boys -	7%	AAUW girls -	11%

According to the AAUW report, math, self concept, and identifying career goals are all highly correlated. If someone says they’re good at math, their self concept is apt to be higher and they are more likely to have identified career goals.

Another comparison to note are the responses to these two questions:

“I speak up a lot in class.”			
LEAP girls -	67%	LEAP boys -	46%
AAUW girls -	20%	AAUW boys -	28%

“My teachers always listen to my ideas.”

LEAP girls - 53%

LEAP boys - 8%

AAUW girls - 19%

AAUW boys - 19%

This indicates that LEAP girls speak up a lot, and the majority feel they are always listened to; whereas, nearly half of the LEAP boys say they speak up a lot, but only a small percent feel they are always listened to.

This, of course, gives a very partial picture. It is not known how these responses would change over time. Black girls in the national sample did not drop significantly in self esteem between elementary school and high school. How

would the LEAP girls—and boys—maintain the levels shown in this sample, over time? What accounts for the gender differences and how do these relate to achievement in high school and beyond? What accounts for the highly positive responses of LEAP youth to the statements: “I like most things about me.”; “I like the way I look.” and “I’m happy the way I am.”?, and what are the implications for supporting these youth over time?

These results raise many important questions to pursue in the assessment of programs such as LEAP designed to foster the healthy development of high-risk youth from age 10 and up in the inner city.

Figure 6. Responses to “I’m Happy the Way I Am.”
Percent “Always True”

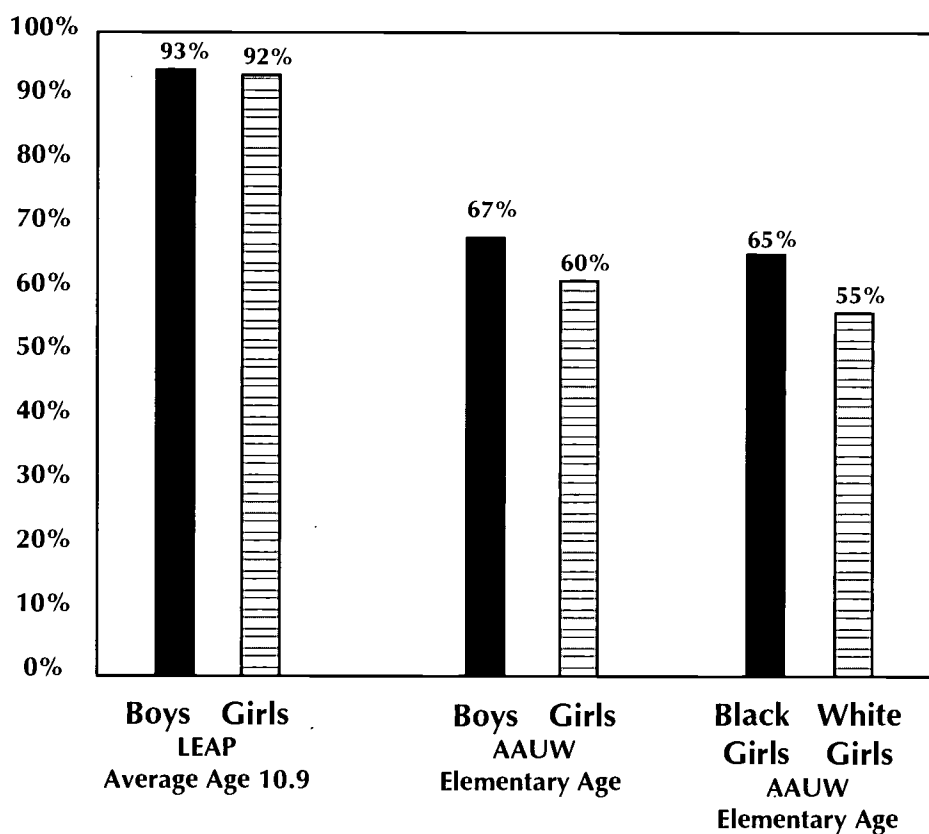


Figure 7: Five Core Statements Relating to Self-Esteem

Comparison of LEAP Youth (Avg. Age 10.9) & AAUW Study (Elementary Age through High School)

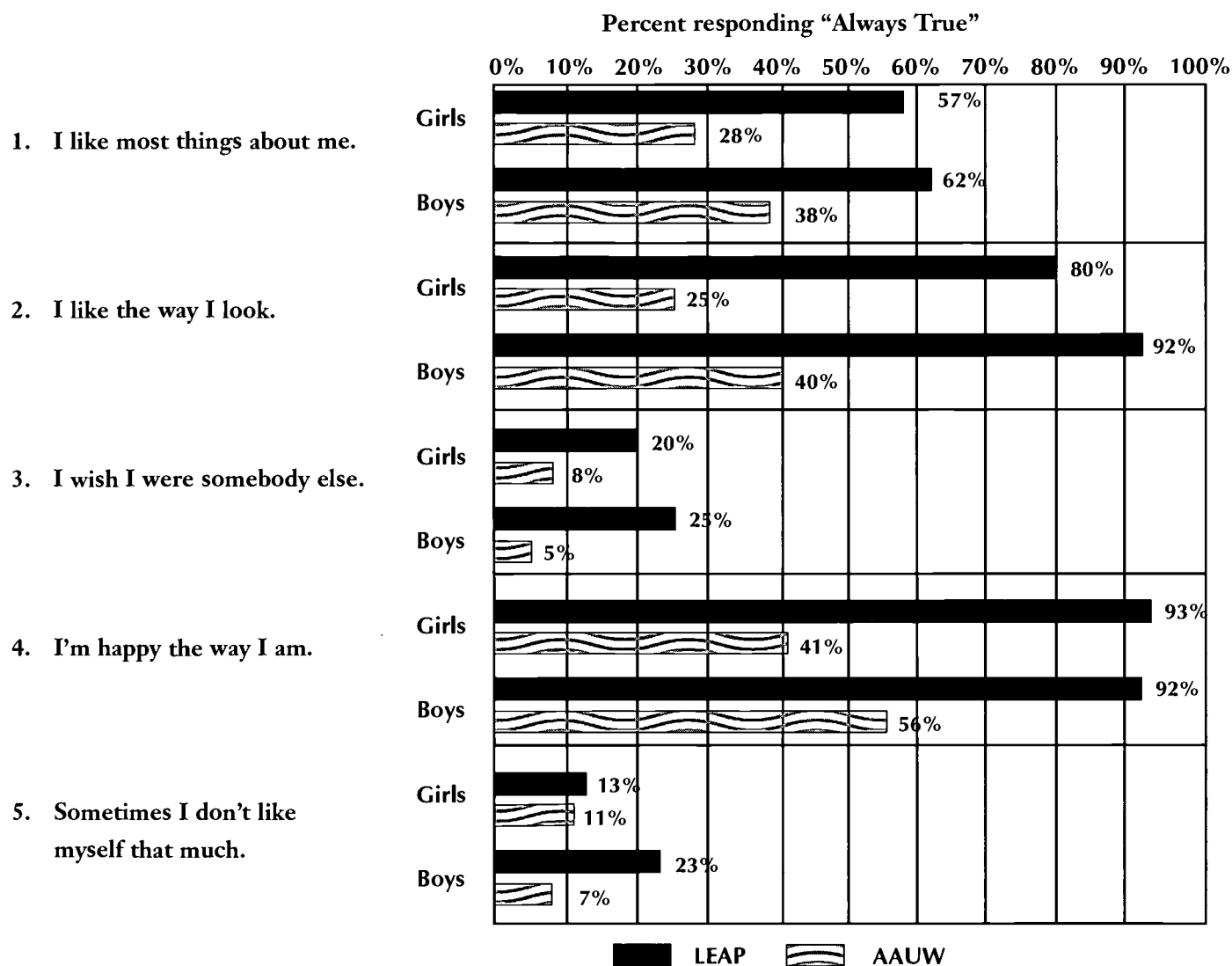
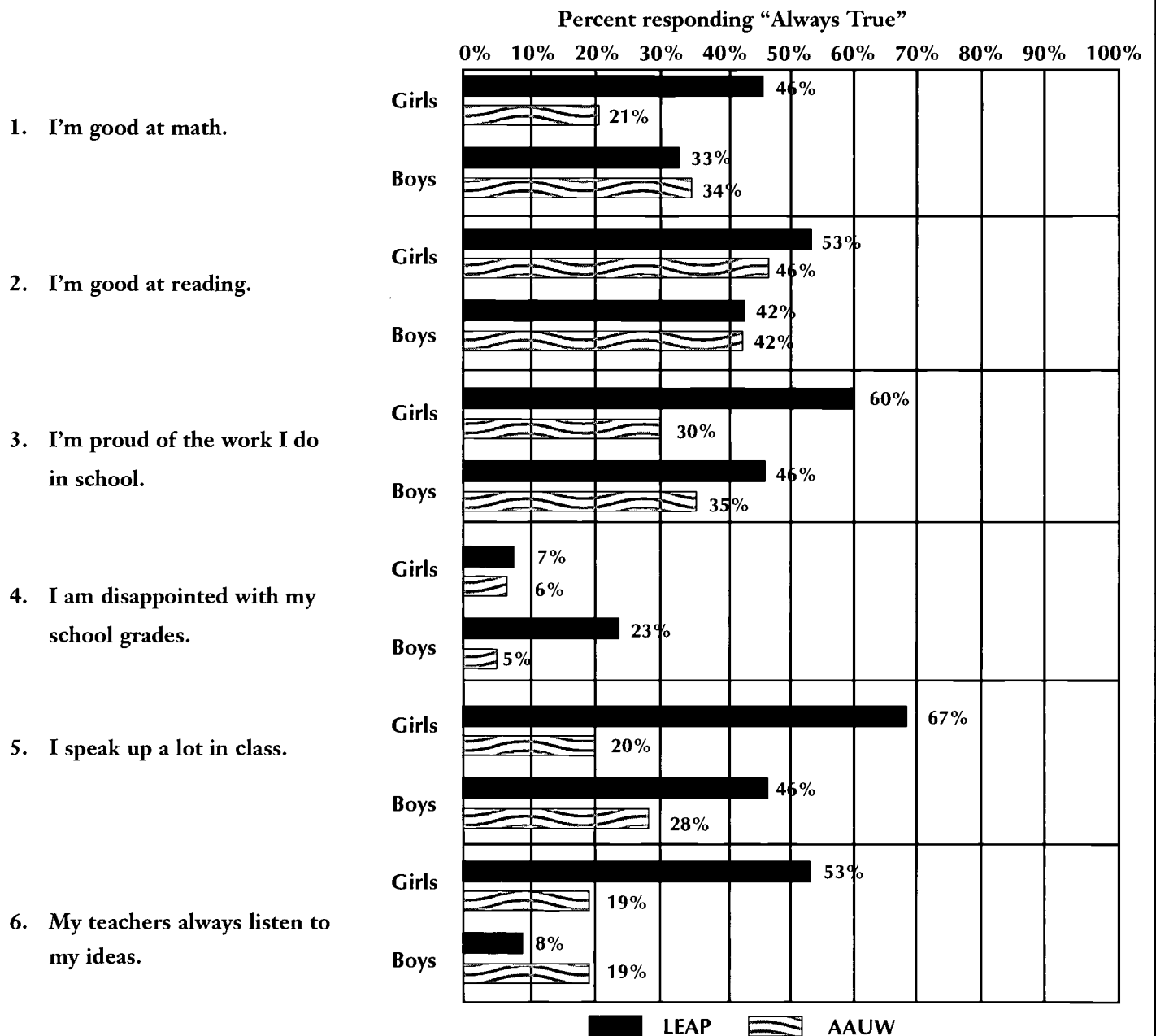


Figure 8: Statements Related to School Work and Teachers
Comparison of LEAP Youth (Avg. Age 10.9) & AAUW Study (Elementary Age through High School)



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- 12) Buhl, Lance, C., "The Evaluation Paradox" *Foundation News & Commentary*, January/February, 1996, p. 36.
- 13) "Great Transitions" see Executive Summary, pp. 9-15.
- 14) Mendel, p. iii.
- 15) Fluegelman, Andrew, editor, *New Games*, (Doubleday/Dolphin, 1981).
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"I saw a boy got shot and died around the ice cream truck, just eating his ice cream. A man came up and shot him and killed him. Drug related. I knew the boy but not that good."

"I was mad and ashamed. Ashamed that he was shot. Scared, too."

"Been with FLOC 2 years. Kept me staying out of trouble, away from shooting."

2nd year LEAP boy, age 12

Author's Note

Eight years with LEAP have been an adventure that has changed my life. I will never think of children in the same way again. I have seen children in the most difficult of circumstances—physical and psychological—respond with incredible courage, determination and, yes, cheerfulness. They have inspired me over and over again with their caring for each other in adversity, their resilience and hope when things look hopeless and their generosity of spirit.

Especially bright in my mind are the boys and girls from the first year of LEAP—Anthony, Kendrick, Lamont, Tim, Tyler, T.J., Dee, Jill, Lolita, Maria and Tameka. There are many others, as well, too many to name here. And then there are the parents, the parents who want the best for their kids, who have taken long bus trips across town to come to meetings, have signed endless papers, baked beautiful cakes for LEAP Christmas parties, attended parents days at camp with babies, toddlers and other younger siblings in tow, and offered to help us in various ways.

It has been an enormous privilege to be part of the lives of these children and their families. I strongly identify with this observation of Jonathan Kozol in *Amazing Grace*:

"Being treated as a friend this way by children in the neighborhood feels like a special privilege. It seems like something you just wouldn't have the right to hope for. Why should these children trust a stranger who can come into their world at will and leave it

*any time he likes? Why should they be so generous and open? Yet many of them are....I think they show us something very different from the customary picture we are given of a generation of young thugs and future whores. There is a golden moment here that our society has chosen not to seize. We have not nourished this part of the hearts of children, not in New York, not really anywhere."*¹⁶

I am grateful to the foundations who, through the Urban Institute, provided the opportunity to distill the work of eight years with the LEAP program in this paper. Also, the strong support from FLOC was critical in taking the risks to innovate with new program concepts. These years have been a rich learning time for me, other staff and volunteers, as well as for the youth in the program.

In order to give a balanced retrospective view of the effect of LEAP on the lives of youth involved, I and a colleague, Sara Anderson Hsiao, have interviewed a number of LEAP youth and their parents. They have been generous in giving us time and sharing their views, and I thank them. Also, I appreciate the input of present and former staff and Sara's excellent editing and general assistance with the manuscript.

If I have any hope for the future, it is that we will find many ways to nourish the hearts and souls of children, the children and "high risk" youth of Washington, DC, and every other part of this country.



Photo by Charlene Williams
LEAP participant



Photo by Charlene Williams, LEAP participant

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